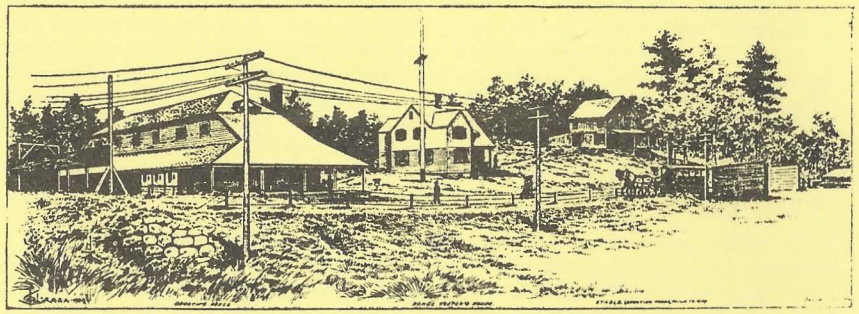
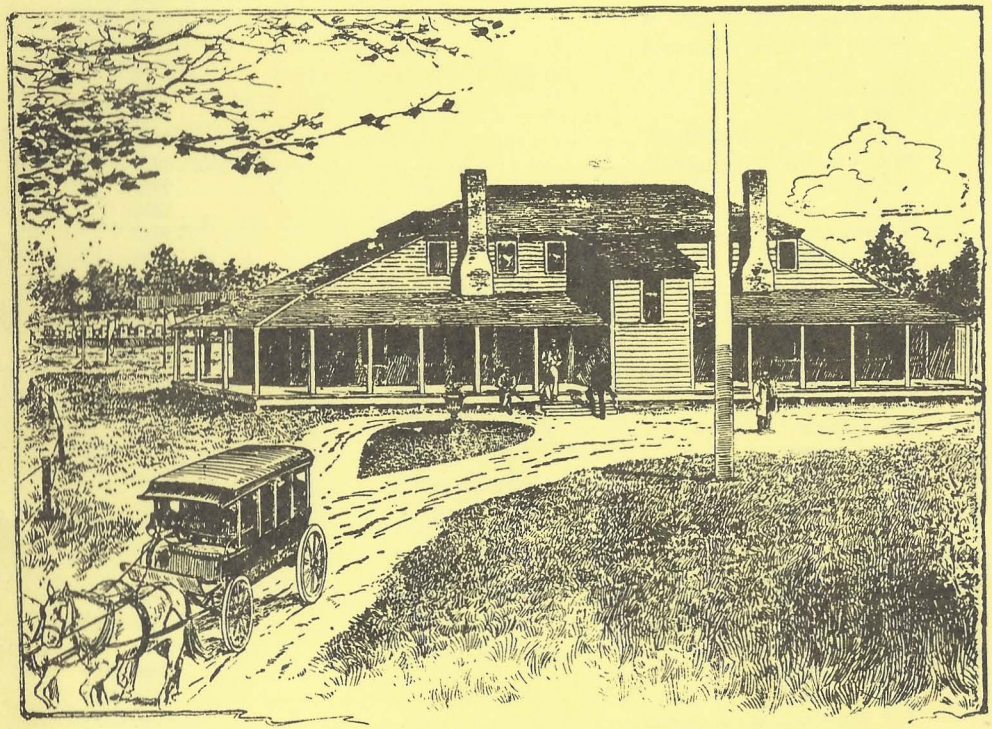


MASSACHUSETTS RIFLE ASSOCIATION
OCULIS ANIMOQUE SAGACI
1875

MASSACHUSETTS RIFLE ASSOCIATION
WALNUT HILL

1875 **1975**

CENTENNIAL PROGRAM
&
CLUB HISTORY



PAST PRESIDENTS

Isaac H. Hazleton	1875
Horace B. Sargent	1876
Chas. A. Longfellow	1877-1878
James N. Frye	1879-1880
Lucius L. Hubbard	1881-1882
Horace T. Rockwell	1883-1888
Lucius L. Hubbard	1889-1890
Nathaniel C. Nash	1891-1892
Horace T. Rockwell	1893
Jabez B. Fellows	1894-1895
Francis J. Rabbeth	1896-1897
Daniel L.F. Chase	1898-1908
Samuel Merrill	1909-1911
C.W. Hinman	1912-1916
Daniel L.F. Chase	1917
Louis Bell	1918-1919
	1920
W.E. Fennel	1921-1922
J.E. Kelley	1923
C.G. Bills	1924
H.H. Bennett	1925
O.E. Gerrish	1926
W.S. Darling	1927
F.G. Beckford	1928
Dr. H.R. Brunton	1929
F.E. Whipple	1930
R.J. Dwyer	1931-1933
W.S. Gibbons	1934-1935
R.E. Gibson	1936
A.P. Lampert	1937-1939
John J. Murray	1940
Geo. E. Thompson	1941
	1942
	1943
Joseph F. Galligan	1944
	1945
Dr. Jose P. Bill	1946-1947
	1948
Austin McHugh	1949-1957
H.E. Nelson	1958-1959
E.P. Matson	1960-1964
T. Driscoll	1965
R. Graves	1966-1967
G. Hutchinson	1968-1969
Arthur R. White	1969-1975

OFFICERS FOR 1975

President
Arthur R. White

Vice-Presidents

Henry J. Bucci — John H. Guiggey

Secretary
William E. Buehler

Treasurer
Robert E. Peary

Directors

John D. Ardito
Henry J. Bucci
William H. Chamberlain
Edward J. Geary
John H. Guiggey
Nathan E. Guyer
Robert Kelly
Michael T. Palumbo
Kenneth E. Perry
Robert D. Rollins
Gerhard A. Schmidt
George W. Seaton
Raymond C. Spinazola
David F. Walsh

Arthur R. White

Executive Officer ..... Raymond C. Spinazola
Chief Rangemaster ..... Edward J. Geary

CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

General Chairman
Nathan E. Guyer

Vice-Chairman
Henry J. Bucci

Secretary
William E. Buehler

Treasurer
Robert E. Peary

Members

Sal Balestrieri
Henry J. Bucci
William E. Buehler
William H. Chamberlain
Edward J. Geary
Nathan E. Guyer
Robert Kelly
Robert E. Peary
Robert D. Rollins
John H. Russell
Gerhard A. Schmidt
George W. Seaton
Raymond C. Spinazola
Arthur R. White

CENTENNIAL MATCHES

During the weekends of June 28 and July 5, 1975, Walnut Hill, the oldest continuously active shooting club in the United States, in celebration of its 100th Anniversary and the Bicentennial of our country, presents a program of black and smokeless powder matches and invites all shooters to enter these matches and be a part of our Centennial celebration.

Rules: Current N.R.A. rules will govern the matches except where specific Mass. Rifle Assoc. rules have been posted. The black powder matches will be governed by N.M.L.R.A. rules. All except Trap matches are re-entry, subject to available time and position for re-entry.

Eligibility: Anyone who agrees to conduct himself in a safe and courteous manner is welcome in the matches.

Classification: All shooters will compete in the open class.

Match Schedule:
June 27, 28, 29

Issac H. Hazleton Memorial Match
30 shots off-hand at 200 yards on the German Ring target scored 0 to 25. Any rifle or free rifle, any calibre, any sights, 30 minutes per shooter relay including 3 sighters. Limit of two re-entrys.

Adolph O. Niedner Memorial Matches
40 shots off-hand at 50 yards on the 50 meter reduced target. Any .22 calibre RF rifle. Two 30 minute relays including unlimited sighters. Limit of two re-entrys in each match.

Match 1: Iron sights.
Match 2: Any sights.

June 28, 29
Centennial Trap Matches
Each day. Complete combination 16 yd. & handicap, 50 bird shoot.

9:00 AM to 12:00 noon ------ 16 yd. 25 bird shoot
1:00 PM to 4:00 PM ------ Handicap 25 bird shoot

Number of birds broken in 16 yd. shoot determines handicap yardage except that minimum handicap shall be 19 yards. Prizes at end of each day.

July 4, 5, 6
Nathaniel C. Nash Sr. Memorial Match
30 shots off-hand at 200 yards on the German Ring target scored 0 to 25. Any standard rifle, any calibre, iron sights, no palm rests, hook butt plates or thumb hole stocks allowed. No restrictions on triggers. 30 minutes per shooter relay including 3 sighters. Limit of two re-entrys.

Harry M. Pope Memorial Black Powder Matches
10 shots off-hand at 50 yards on the German Ring target reduced for 50 yards, scored 12 to 25. (One or two hand hold at 25 yards for pistol match 5.) 30 minutes per shooter relay. Original or replica arms acceptable. Unlimited re-entrys.

Match 1: Flintlock, ball, open sights.
Match 2: Caplock rifle or musket, ball or bullet, open sights.
Match 3: Military rifle or musket, ball or bullet, open sights in original position.
Match 4: Single shot breechloading rifle, bullet, duplex load up to 10% smokeless, any iron sights.
Match 5: Any cap and ball single shot or revolver pistol, ball or bullet.

July 4, 5
Centennial Trap Matches
July 4: 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM—50 bird 16 yard shoot.
July 5: 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM—50 bird fixed doubles shoot.
Prizes at end of each day.

Registration Fee: $3.00 per shooter. Allows entry in one or all matches. The fee entitles the shooter to a special Centennial brassard, a souvenir program of events including the club history, a complete match results bulletin, and a raffle ticket for a drawing for a Commemorative Zouave rifle as described in the section on prizes. Drawing to be held Sunday, July 6 at 5:00 PM.

Individual Match Fees

Hazleton - $6.00 entry plus $3.00 each re-entry.
Niedner - $4.00 entry plus $2.00 each re-entry, each match.
Nash - $6.00 entry plus $3.00 each re-entry.
Pope - $2.00 entry plus $1.00 each re-entry, each match.
Trap - $7.00 entry each match.

Prizes:

Each match listed for Hazleton, Niedner, Nash, Centennial Trap.

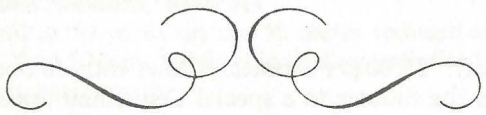
1st Place: Gold filled Centennial medallion in presentation box.
2nd Place: Silver Centennial medallion in presentation box.
3rd Place: Bronze Centennial medallion in presentation box.

Each match listed of the Pope Black Powder Matches.

1st Place: Bronze Centennial medallion in presentation box.
2nd Place: Blackinton medal in lucite.
3rd Place: Blackinton medal in lucite.

For all matches listed for Hazleton, Niedner, Nash, and Pope. In addition to the above, a bronze Centennial medallion will be given to each tenth place after 15 entrys, plus every 10 entrys thereafter.

The Centennial medallions have been designed and a limited number struck for this centennial year only, and the die will be destroyed after the celebration so no more can be made and their value will be enhanced in the future. The gold filled medallions are being offered to club members only. The silver and bronze are available only as prizes in the centennial year matches. The special Commemorative Zouave rifles are also a very limited registered, serially numbered group of .58 calibre Navy Arms rifles with the gold Centennial medallion insert in the stock just forward of the patch box which were offered to the club members by reservation only. Thus each shooter has a chance to win a unique prize that will increase in value with time and that cannot be duplicated.



HISTORY

OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS RIFLE ASSOCIATION

By William Loeb

It is rumored, and believed by many, that on certain windless nights when there is not even a single tiny breeze to deflect the perfect bullet fired from a perfect gun at the perfect target, there is a gathering of the ghosty greats who once in life walked through the doors of Walnut Hill and matched their skills to try to develop the perfect rifle, the perfect gun and to make the perfect score.

There is Harry Pope, whom some regard as the greatest barrel maker of all time. Joined by Adolph Neidner, ex-gunsmith, genius extraordinary, who did the pioneer work in developing a .22 high powered cartridge, which he tested on the range at Walnut Hill. There is Dr. Franklin Mann of the Scientist and Ballistician, described as possibly without a peer in the science of ballistics. Another is E.E. Patridge, inventor of the Patridge pistol sight most used today. Arthur Corbin Gould, a civilian firearms enthusiast, an early member of the Mass. Rifle Assn. who in 1885 brought out the first issue of "The Rifle" the predecessor of the present "American Rifleman," the official publication of the National Rifle Association, is there also.

They talk of all they have learned since they left Walnut Hill forever and how now they have the answers to all the problems that they could never figure out while here below. They quietly chuckle to themselves as they point out that the shooters who follow in their train will solve many of those problems but there will be others still unsolved and that will be the challenge that will forever keep the present day members of MRA occupied in the eternal quest for perfection in the art of rifle shooting.

When dawn's early light begins to come, they depart quite happily because they know that all is still well with Walnut Hill, the oldest organized club of rifle shooters in the Uniied States.

The Mass. Rifle Assn. was founded following a meeting in Boston at four o'clock in the afternoon of November 4, 1875. The twenty shooting enthusiasts who gathered that afternoon probably never realized what they began on that Fall afternoon would become the most famous shooting club in the United States and would endure for over 100 years. They were simply a group of gentlemen in a day long before the multiple diversions of our own who wanted to gather together and enjoy the sport of seeing who was the best shot.

Their first move was to select a site and they settled on the present area in Woburn known as Walnut Hill. In those days, the Club's property was heavily wooded and was a relatively remote country site, reached only by what was known as a barge operated by the Club which brought members from the railroad station. The barge might be described as a horse-drawn bus where the members sat opposite each other on the board seats.

Yet so great was the enthusiasm engendered by the new Club that often on a weekend, there were as many as 400 shooters. So dedicated were they to the art of shooting that 14 short years later, the Mass. Volunteer Militia sent a Walnut Hill trained rifle team to Wimbleton where it won every match it could enter under the rules of the National Rifle Association of Great Britain. By 1890, a year later, Walnut Hill had actually become almost as well known as Creedmoor.

Since accomplishment in the field of shooting was the first object of the Club, the early concentration of the members' efforts, of course, evolved around the proper setting up of the ranges. As early as 1876, two targets were being provided at 200 and 300 yards, with 21 shooters participating. Targets of cast iron made in sections were bolted together in the back used in early years were supplanted by steel in about 1880 when the change was made to the present system of paper targets.

The first targets at 500 and 600 yards were then erected on December 19, 1876 and the first at 800, 900 and 1,000 yards on April 17, 1877.

Until the Fall of 1878, there was no shelter at all for the shooters at any firing point except a portable canvas awning which was moved from one position to another as required. Then the first more substantial protection for the hunters was a so-called winter shed, which was erected at the 200 yard firing line.

The present clubhouse was erected in the summer of 1891 while Nathaniel C. Nash was President and a 50 and 25 yard pistol range were added shortly thereafter. Nathaniel Cushing Nash, President from 1891 to 1892, was the father of Nathaniel Cushing Nash, former President of the National Rifle Association from Marblehead and now the Massachusetts Rifle Association's only Life Member.

The 1,000 yard range fell into disuse quite a good many years ago and the land on which it once ran is now crossed by Route 128, the circumferential highway running from north to southwest of Boston. Shooting was continued up to 500 yards at Walnut Hill until 1948. In that year, a nearly spent bullet entered a house that was located on an extension of the 500 yard range. An injunction was filed against the Mass. Rifle Assn. which prohibited shooting other than with a .22 rifle on the Walnut Hill Range.

The Association proved conclusively that the bullet could not have been fired from Walnut Hill Range and in 1950, the injunction was lifted and the Club resumed high power shooting, but only after taking proper and adequate safeguards to make it impossible for a bullet fired at a target in the normal manner from the firing line to leave the range. Among other safeguards are the restricting of high power rifle fire at 200 yards and also erecting a safety barrier immediately in front of the firing line.

In recent years, extensive renovations have been carried out for the repair and repainting and refurbishing of the Clubhouse as well as improvements on the ranges. This includes, also, the trap range, which now has two automatic target throwing machines.

One of the innovations developed at Walnut Hill was bench rest shooting. This became popular at Walnut Hill around 1885. When it was first suggested by one of the members, he was ridiculed by his fellow members because they said that anyone with a rest could shoot into the bullseye all day long and with little or no skill. However, their first match soon exploded that theory. They quickly learned that it took more than a tyro to place the ten consecutive shots within the 8'' bullseye, bench rest or no bench rest.

The early rests they shot from were quite primitive, being nothing more than a plank arranged at a proper angle and the shooter seated on the camp stool by its side.

Early accounts say that the shooter making the first perfect score on the standard American target at 200 yards was D.L.F. Chase on June 5, 1886.

Yet Walnut Hill reflected not only the limitations of ballistics and mechanics of that day, but also the more leisurely tempo of the times. It is hard to visualize in this age of simply slipping a cartridge into the breech of a rifle the amount of time and effort required by the early day Walnut Hill shooters, who up until almost World War I, of course, used muzzle loaders.

After each shot, the shooter took a Fisher brush which was dipped in a jar of water and then pushed through the bore. This brush had a bristle top with a series of rubber disks behind it. Then red, blue and white, one or two white patches were pushed through the barrel on a double-slotted ramrod, one after the other, to clean and dry the bore for the next shot. In spite of this long procedure, which also included the actual loading process, the shooters were able to get off as many as 100 shots in two and one-half or three hours. Today, many a shooter must get his shooting done in an hour and a half to fulfill his many other obligations.

In loading these rifles, extreme care was taken, which seemed to have been one of the secrets of the fine groups that were shot. Some members had false muzzles on their rifles, like those on the old percussion match rifles, and seated the bullet from the muzzle. Others breechseated the bullet with a special tool, the bullet being seated in the bore. 1/16th to 1/32'' ahead of the mouth of the case. They weighed all their bullets, powder charges and primers. Some of them used lubricated bullets and some used bullets with Chase paper patch which was set up by D.L.F. Chase and went once around the bullet. The Chase patch dropped off when the bullet left the muzzle of the rifle and it was an improvement over the Sharps patch paper which sometimes caused a wild shot by failing to drop off the bullet. Those old time shooters who used the Sharps patch would often slit them up the side with a sharp knife before seating them in the bore. Those paper patches were shot dry, not oiled, like the cross paper patches used by percussion match rifle shooters. A few hundred shots with dry patches would polish the bore of a rifle like glass.

It was in the years shortly after the turn of the century that Adolph Neidner, Harry Pope and Dr. Mann did some of their most fascinating work at Walnut Hill. It was in those years when Neidner was shooting at Walnut Hill that he became annoyed with the poor accuracy of the .22 long cartridges that were then on the market. When no one else offered to improve them, he decided to do so himself. Working with Dr. Mann, he evolved the really first effective .22 long cartridge. He also made some interesting experiments with barrels. He found, for instance, that the 7½'' barrel will give all there is in a .22 long cartridge. But, of course, he realized the barrel was so short it wouldn't make a rifle that could be shot prone or offhand, so he finally settled on a 15'' barrel which was the shortest he could use and still shoot prone.

Neidner tells the amusing story of those days when he points out that all the offhand shots had a habit of calling their shots and could do it pretty accurately most of the time. He mentioned our Life Member, Col. Nathaniel Cushing Nash, as a young man coming out to Walnut Hill Range with his father. According to Neidner, Nash was watching Neidner shoot one day, a .32-40 Ballard at 200 yards. Neidner was calling the shots. Our Life Member watched for awhile and then is alleged to have said, ''Why, you can do it every time.'' Neidner said, ''Oh, yes, I am willing to bet a dollar I can call ten shots correctly as a fire them.''

Nash bit so Neidner loaded the Ballard and fired into the backstop and said, ''That's a miss.'' Nash looked puzzled and didn't say anything so Neidner loaded again and fired twice more into the backstop, each time saying, ''That's a miss.'' After the third shot, Nash caught on and realized that he had been ''taken,'' that he had bet after all that Neidner couldn't call the shots accurately and obviously, if Neidner wanted to fire into the backstop, he could call them accurately every time. As Neidner said, it was just a joke and he wouldn't take Nash's money.

Dr. Franklin W. Mann wrote his famous book on ballistics, ''The Bullet's Flight'' in those early days when he was shooting at Walnut Hill. Dr. Mann, as a physicist and also a great expert on ballistics, of course, was a tremendous help as advisor to Neidner and Pope. He was also an extremely generous individual with the Club itself. On one occasion, Dr. Mann gave a Pope machine rest to the Mass. Rifle Assn. and had it installed at Walnut Hill in a concrete base, where it was there for any of the members to use.

Also, Harry Pope, considered by many to have been the world's greatest rifle barrel maker, shot often and did much of his experimental work at Walnut Hill where he could exchange views with Dr. Mann and Adolph Neidner.

Pope had quite a sense of humor. He tacked up on the wall of his dimly lit shop a target with a big black bullseye. In the exact center of the target was a tiny group of shots all in one hole. On the margin of the target, he marked 600 with two little dots meaning inches. Any customer eventually spotted the target. His hair would almost stand on end at the sight of such accuracy at 600 yards. Thereupon, the following dialogue often occurred. ''My God, was this done with one of your barrels? Pope, ''Why, yes.'' Customer, ''Well, it must be a world record at this distance.'' Pope, ''Why, sir, I believe it is.''

Pope would then carefully point out to the nonobservant customer that the ditto marks indicated that this was 600 inches, not 600 yards.

With this innocent little trick, he tripped up many a shooter and conveyed a valuable lesson that common sense always prevails in rifle shooting as everywhere else. As a result, one should not allow his reason to be upset by the sight of accuracy that is not justified by experience.

Of course, when evaluating the work of these pioneers in barrel and bullet making, who attempted to improve the accuracy of U.S. rifles, we must remember that these men worked without the scientific marvels of our modern machine age. While much of what they did was unbelievably fine work, they were handicapped by lack of tools and even lack of certain steels now available. This makes their accomplishments all the greater.

Revolver shooting was also very strong in the early days. One of the earliest important pistol matches on record was shot at Walnut Hill in the Fall of 1886. This match drew professional shooter Chevalier Paine, in addition to the amateur entrants. Chevalier Paine shot 148 out of a possible 150 with his closest competitor scoring 142. Of Chevalier Paine, our Honorary Life Member, Mr. Nathaniel Cushing Nash writes, "It is my recollection he wasn't a very constant attendant but I do recollect a story about him. It went something like this.

He lived on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston and for some reason, I don't know whether he found a robber in his home or discovered another man trying to make advances to his wife, but anyway he pulled a gun on him and ordered him out onto the tree-lined park which goes along the center of Commonwealth Avenue and told him to run.

When the intruder began running, our Walnut Hill shooter started shooting at the ground on each side of the man's running feet. When the man sued him for assault, Mr. Paine had no trouble getting friends to testify that he was such a skilled shot, the bullets did not hit the man, that it was Paine's intention only to scare him." So pistol practice at Walnut Hill evidently had other benefits to it then just for skill on the range!

Almost the most interesting aspect of the Mass. Rifle Assn. has been its capacity for survival. History is littered with the glories that were Greece and the grandeurs that were Rome. Likewise, history of shooting in the United States sees scattered over the years shooting organizations which flared up momentarily and had their happy and sunny days and then faded away completely from the shooting scene.

Whether it was the dedication 100 years ago of the founders of the Mass. Rifle Assn. or whether there is something in the air at Walnut Hill, the Club has continued to thrive and prosper in an age that is not friendly to guns or rifle shooting and at a time when the urban and suburban sprawl has closed in on it.

Under the leadership of President Arthur R. White, the Club has not only been refurbished inside and out but it today carries on a vigorous program of matches in high power as well as small bore and also on the trap field.

Walnut Hill also has not only an eye for the past, but the future. The future is pretty well provided for by the fact that the MRA has an excellent program for the juniors, both boys and girls, with a full course of instruction each year. This will provide the Club with many younger members of hunters and good shooters in the years to come.

Yet probably the founding fathers of Walnut Hill would be proudest of the atmosphere that surrounds the Club. The membership is dedicated to not only the finest aspects of the shooting sports, but to gentlemanly and friendly behavior. Visitors to the Club often remark on the atmosphere of quiet friendship and fun that seems to engulf the entire organization, where a morning or afternoon of shooting can be a complete refresher away from the hectic and confused world outside of the magic boundaries of Walnut Hill.